

# Soviets Seek Wider Acceptance of Regime in Kabul

*Campaign Would Burnish Babrak's Image, Press Him to Broaden His Political Base*

By Gary Lee

Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 15—The Soviet Union is orchestrating a campaign to widen international recognition of the regime it imposed in Afghanistan, according to western and Asian diplomats here. The campaign involves stepping up pressure on Afghan leader Babrak Karmal to broaden his political base and to advertise his will for political compromise through the international news media.

The efforts have resulted in the inclusion of a prominent noncommunist in the Babrak government and a well-advertised appeal from Kabul, quickly seconded by Moscow, for dissenting Afghan groups to return to the fold.

Eleven noncommunists were added to the Afghan government early this year—a deputy prime minister, five ministers and five deputy ministers—according to a Jan. 3 article in Pravda, the Soviet Communist Party newspaper.

Afghanistan needs “an atmosphere conducive to positive dialogue between various sociopolitical forces, including the ones who have so far felt negative about the April revolution,” Pravda said.

In their pitch to groups opposing the Afghan government from abroad and within the country, Babrak and various Soviet officials have begun admitting with unusual candor the mistakes they say were made after the Afghan leader was installed in December 1979.

In addition, the Afghan government seems to be mounting a public relations campaign abroad. Last week, Babrak gave a rare interview to Asahi, Japan's leading newspaper. Yesterday Afghanistan's envoy here invited about 20 Moscow-based reporters from western, Asian and neutral countries on a week-long trip to Afghanistan.

Visas for western journalists to visit Afghanistan usually take months to process and are seldom approved.

The increased contact between Afghans and foreign journalists coincides with greatly increased coverage of the Afghan war in the Soviet press in recent months.

The purposes of the concerted efforts, according to the analyses of western and Asian diplomats here, are:

- To redress the tactical mistakes made during the first few years of Soviet occupation, when the opposition to rebel forces was rock-hard, western coverage of the fighting was mostly clandestine and there was virtually no Soviet reporting;
- To pave the way for improved relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, China and other countries for which the war is proving a stumbling block;

■ To strengthen Moscow's hand for eventual negotiations for a political solution in the six-year-old war.

Many western analysts in the Soviet capital interpret the efforts to expand the political base of the Babrak-led government as a clear-cut signal that a Kremlin-backed political solution would involve a continuation of the present Afghan regime.

The Soviet leadership is indicating that it might agree to “some changes in the composition of the Afghan government,” according to one senior western diplomat in Moscow, “but that the regime there now is the one it expects to stay—with or without a political solution.”

During the U.S.-Soviet summit meeting in November, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev impressed some senior U.S. officials with his open support of a political solution to the war in Afghanistan.

However, since the summit, Soviet officials have repeated the Kremlin policy that cites “outside interference”—including U.S. and Pakistani-backed rebel forces—as the reason for the prolongation of the war.

[Afghanistan's U.N. Ambassador Farid Zarif said today that his government is ready to reveal the timetable for Soviet troop withdrawal from his country if Pakistan agrees to hold direct negotiations about a border dispute, United Press International reported.]

[Zarif told a news conference: “Pakistan will be pleasantly surprised by the timetable. We are ready to trade our last card (the timetable) anytime Pakistan wants to see it on condition that Pakistan talks directly to us.”]

At the Afghan communist party meeting in mid-November, Babrak appealed for a political dialogue with Afghan groups that had opposed his government.

Pravda said Dec. 21, “Reconciliation presupposes known compromises.” The Babrak government, it added, has declared “its readiness to admit representatives of various strata and groups into the leading bodies of state authority.”

The editorial, published a week before the sixth anniversary of the Soviet invasion on Dec. 27, 1979, also specified with unusual frankness Moscow's view of the mistakes made in the early years of Babrak's rule. “A considerable number of people fell for mendacious counterrevolutionary propaganda,” Pravda said.

“Errors of the first stage of revolution—passion for revolutionary phrases, enforcement of social reforms without due account for the real situation, social and national specifics of the country—had a negative effect too,” it said.

But neither the Soviet officials nor Babrak have indicated publicly whether their outreach to opponents of the revolution would include compromises with the Islamic guerrillas who form the bulwark of resistance. They firmly oppose recognition of the government and any form of negotiation with Babrak.